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ABSTRACT

The paper considers difficulties facing black gifted children and examines the importance of language variability, classroom management, and learning to think. The nature of Black English is explored with various viewpoints of its origins, and suggestions are made for dealing with the special needs of students who have inadequate mastery of standard English. Research on aspects of classroom management is reviewed, touching on such topics as values clarification and learning centers. The author suggests that the teacher of black gifted children should possess: (1) precise use of the mother language; (2) the ability to use variable English as a positive tool; (3) flexibility; and (4) understanding of the diverse cultural and socio-economic influences affecting such students. The ability to think critically is emphasized, and approaches to encourage critical thinking are briefly mentioned, including getting students to ask thought provoking questions; using newspapers, magazines, and television as learning tools; and encouraging discussion of current events. (CL)

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CRITICAL THINKING.....NEVER HEARD OF IT

A great professor at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, Dr. Malvin Moore, Jr. stated in a doctoral seminar that a person who thinks best in his/her language is the best thinker. The thinker has correct and precise use of the mother tongue. Dr. Moore further stated that there are four types of thinking: 1) emotional, 2) factual, 3) theoretical, and 4) philosophical. The majority of Black children, specifically gifted, have been trained to think emotionally without testing the emotional thought. Further, Dr. Moore stipulated that a major problem of Blacks is the inadequacy of the mother language which may also be a reason for testing biases.

Although many Blacks have not mastered the mother tongue, Green (1953) developed a procedure which prepared Blacks to overcome deficits. The program conducted in Brooklyn Bedford-Stuyvesant section trained Blacks to compensate for deficits of the mother tongue. Further, it prepared them to take culturally biased tests. The results from the study proved that Blacks were capable of passing aptitude tests and scoring above the norms.

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The Black gifted and talented child has to prepare his/her self for cultural biased testing by becoming precise and correct users of standard English. Further the Black child has to be prepared to overcome language variables which many times cause underachievement and unrecognized giftedness. This paper will discuss the importance of: a) language variability, b) classroom management, and, c) building a bridge to thinking successfully.

Black English

Black English, also referred to as Black dialect and Pidgen English, is often confused with the term Black slang. Black English is structured around the misuse of verbal and plural tenses used in standard English. Black slang is an invention of words and phrases used primarily for jovial communication between Blacks. An example of this is: 1) "What's hap'nin Blood?", 2) "Stay cool "Brer", 3) "A! check out that hawgg", or 4) "Chill out!".

The emergence of understanding of Black English has been a major concern of linguists in modern America today. A few investigators discussed the emergence of Black English. Williamson (1982) cited the British Isles Influence Theory as the major cause of Black English. This theory contends that Black English came as a result of an outside culture influencing the original culture. As a result, the original confused the new language with their original language.

An example of cultural confusion can be found in New Orleans, Louisiana, where Blacks have a mixture of French and English. Dillard (1972) completely disagreed with the British Isle Influence Theory. He felt that Black English entailed more than a mere cultural influence.

Dillard (1972) supported the idea that social factors determined the type of English usage. He further indicated that there were three language groups that gradually developed among the African slaves that came to America. He further suggests that these language groups exist today. The three groups are as follow:

1) Those who learned the English of their masters, who were either house servants or mechanics allowed to work in the towns eventually becoming freedmen,
2) The great mass of native born field workers, who spoke Plantation Creole eventually becoming sharecroppers, and,
3) Those imported from Africa who brought Pidgen English with them eventually becoming the leaders of the Black society.

The above mentioned social factors (social structure) determined the type of English used, and accounted for social differences among slaves (Dillard, 1972). The writer concurs that these social differences still exist in America today.

It is the writers opinion that distinguishable social

differences that exist in America today include those that have the following characteristics:

1) Four to 8 years or more of college (Ph.D.'s, medical doctors, dentists, lawyers) use Black English on very rare occasions, if ever;
2) Four to 6 years of college with a degree (school teachers, supervisors, director of programs, principals) use Black English occasionally among friends;
3) High school diploma to 2 year college program (foremen, electricians, auto mechanics, nurses) may have problems with standard English either, oral or written communication;
4) Seventh grade to eleventh grade (custodians, cooks, maids, welfare recepients) may or may not struggle to educate their offspring beyond a high school diploma and use Black English as the only form of communication.

Among the different levels of social classes exist a problem with social interest as well as verbal and written communication. Dillard (1972) suggested that these problems were caused by social suppresion. He further stated that:

> A dialect or language variety is maintained by social pressure within its own group of speakers, although the speakers are seldom fully aware that they are maintaining it. In many cases, subconscious pressures maintain the dialect while the speakers every conscious effort is to change to another.
> Group identity is perhaps the strongest of such pressures. (Dillard, 1972, p. 114).

According to Dillard (1972) there constitutes three types of non-standard English spoken in the United States (Africans, American Indians, and Chinese). He strongly indicated that non-standard English was not an impoverished language, but that the groups mentioned above were economically exploited. Dillard further indicated that 80 percent of the Black population of the Unites States speak Black English. He further suggested the Puerto Ricans in New York City, New York and Seminole Indians in various northern cities speak Black English. Dillard contended that Black English could not be equated with ethnic patterns.

Unlike Dillard, some theorist believed that Black English evolved from genetic or hereditary disorders. Seymour and Seymour (1981) described Black English as an articulation problem. They further stipulated that Black's were not able to pronounce and slur their words because of "thick lips". Dillard (1972) challenged this theory by giving an example of a Black College professor with thick lips who spoke perfect standard English.

Linn and Piche (1982) investigated attitudes toward Black English. The purpose of their study was to describe attitudinal changes of 240 subjects. The subjects were Black and White, heterosexual, middle class and lower class adolescents and preadolescents. They listened to tape recorded samples of standard English (SE) and Black English (BE). Linn and Piche concluded that (BE) was not considered

a negative aspect, but associational toward athletes. The subjects concluded that males using BE were athletes. Further, the subjects substantiated that SE was important in educational endeavors. This research supports the contention that children reach the zenith of ethnic identity at the beginning of puberty and are stereotyped or categorized as athletes using (BE) or educators (SE) users. (Lambert, Frankel, and Tuckers, 1960). Newell (1981) suggested that a change in teacher ability to learn standard English. Some researchers felt that there was a need for teachers to have more than attitudinal changes.

Ferguson (1982) reported that riots of the sixties were a direct cause for the result of the acceptance of Black English in the American school systems. She felt that both Black and white teachers accepted the misuse of standard English both verbal and written. As long as the instructor understood or discerned the statement, the student was given a high grade (B or above). Ferguson also stated that in the late Sixties and early Seventies, standard English was considered definitely white and not the speech to maintain one's Black identity (Ferguson 1982). She further indicated that Black teachers could not use standard English at all times in the classroom, or they would be ridiculed and labeled. Jackson (1981) felt that teachers should develop standard English among Black disadvantage children. The following suggestions were recommended for teachers: 1) create a warm environment, 2) understand the potential for the different

interpretations of written materials by disadvantaged Black children, and 3) use the children's language for beginning instruction. Along with the instructional aspects of teaching Blacks standard English, there is a need for an understanding of the cultural differences of the Black child.

Anderson (1982) believes that Black English serves definite needs and functions in the Black Community. Teachers can develop cultural needs of Black students through the English Composition class for motivational and instructional purposes. Although this strategy is a useful tool for teachers, the Black student does not need to be isolated or singled out. Robinson and others (1981) also felt that the Black student would not gain by being isolated or singled out in the class. He felt that the dialect of Black's like that of others whose English is accented, could contribute to the cultural richness of the American classroom.

Hollins (1982) saw the need to integrate the Black childs' family, peer group, church, and other community services concerning writing and speaking standard English. Hollins strongly suggested that working with the child alone was not enough because of outside influences.

In conclusion, there are three major perceptions for the rationale of Black English. These are: 1) Africanism, 2) economic suppression, and 3) riots of the sixties. Teachers need to be aware of the different needs of the Black gifted student and be able to teach the child

acknowledging the cultural differences.

Teachers should include a plan of communication instruction according to Labov (1966). Labov suggested that an order of greatest significance should be considered. Labov included: 1) understanding of spoken English; 2) reading and comprehending printed material; 3) communicating to others in spoken English; 4) expressing ideas in writing; 5) using standard English for written communication; 6) spelling correctly; 7) using standard English in oral communication and, 8) using appropriate pronunciation in order to avoid stigmatization. Labov has used a hierachy of objectives to help the child from basic communication to the use of standard English forms. Using this sequential order will enable children to move from non-standard to standard English.

Cohen and Pluskon (1980) refer to Black English as variant English. They suggested that standard English be taught as an integrated function from the following list:

1) flexibility of the English language;
2) incorporating environmental influences;
3) parallelism of variant English and standard English;
4) using proper English versus variant English
5) opportunities for usage and expression
6) including spontaneous dialogues and structure drills
7) allowing simple time for children to learn standard forms and motivating them to use it

8) providing opportunity for use of bidialectism (shifting from standard to non-standard English)

Further, Cohen and Pluskon indicated that language instruction should provide realistic communication expectations, (basic grammer, structure and expression).

Classroom Management

Classroom management is very important when teaching Black gifted children. First we shall consider the teachers role. Torrence (1965) pointed out some of the characteristics needed to teach the gifted. He included: courageousness of one's own conviction, independence of judgment and unwillingness to accept the judgment of authorities. The writer further feels that a teacher of the Black gifted child should possess:

1) precise use of the mother language;
2) the ability to use variable English as a positive tool toward learning standard English;
3) flexibility; and,
4) understanding of the diverse cultural and socio-economic influences.

A study of value-clarification will help clarify the teachers understanding of cultural and socio-economic influences of the Black gifted child.

Value clarification, as defined by Simon, Howe & Kirschenbaum (1972), is the act of making decisions, making opinions, thinking and acting on daily life situations. Value, according to Rath (1966) is comprised of seven

sub-processes. These sub-processes include: 1) prizing and cherishing; 2) publicly affirming when appropriate; 3) choosing from alternatives; 4) choosing after consideration of consequences; 5) choosing freely; 6) acting; and, 7) acting with a pattern, consistency and repetition. Teachers can use the value-clarification approach as a means of beginning to understand Black values socio-economically and culturally. Once teachers understand the Black socio-economic and clutural values of the gifted population, then they can implement a program.

The classroom for the Black gifted child should include a plethora of learning experiences. These experiences should include academic areas such as science, creative writing, standard English, stressing critical thinking skills. The classroom should further create an atmosphere of "I want to learn as much as I can" in the child. Teachers should be daring, use mix medias such as creative movement, art and music. The writer feels that learning centers are an added dimension to the classroom setting (see Figure I). Also, the writer feels that space should be available for group activities such as discussion and role play. The Black gifted needs a wide variety of learning experiences. Especially needed with the Black gifted child is the development of critical thinking skills.

Building a Bridge to Successful Thinking

Harnadek, A. (1976) stated that a student learns how

to think critically not by being told the process but given the experience. The objective that Harnadek emphasized was getting students to ask thought provoking questions. Every experience in the class should emphasize critical thinking development. Newspaper, magazines, and television are all very good tools to help enhance critical thinking skills. Have students discuss current issues, and voice their opinions. Teach Black gifted students how to become critical listeners, decipher what the speaker that critical thinking skills develop from precise use of the mother language.

Conclusion

Needs of Black gifted students are basically the same as all children, "Plenty of Caring Teachers". Teachers care that your students are not speaking standard English - correct them; care about culture and socio-economic differences; and care that "a mind is a terrible thing to waste". Once you have gathered data and can understand and appreciate Black gifted children work with them, nurture them, and let them blossom to their greatest potential.

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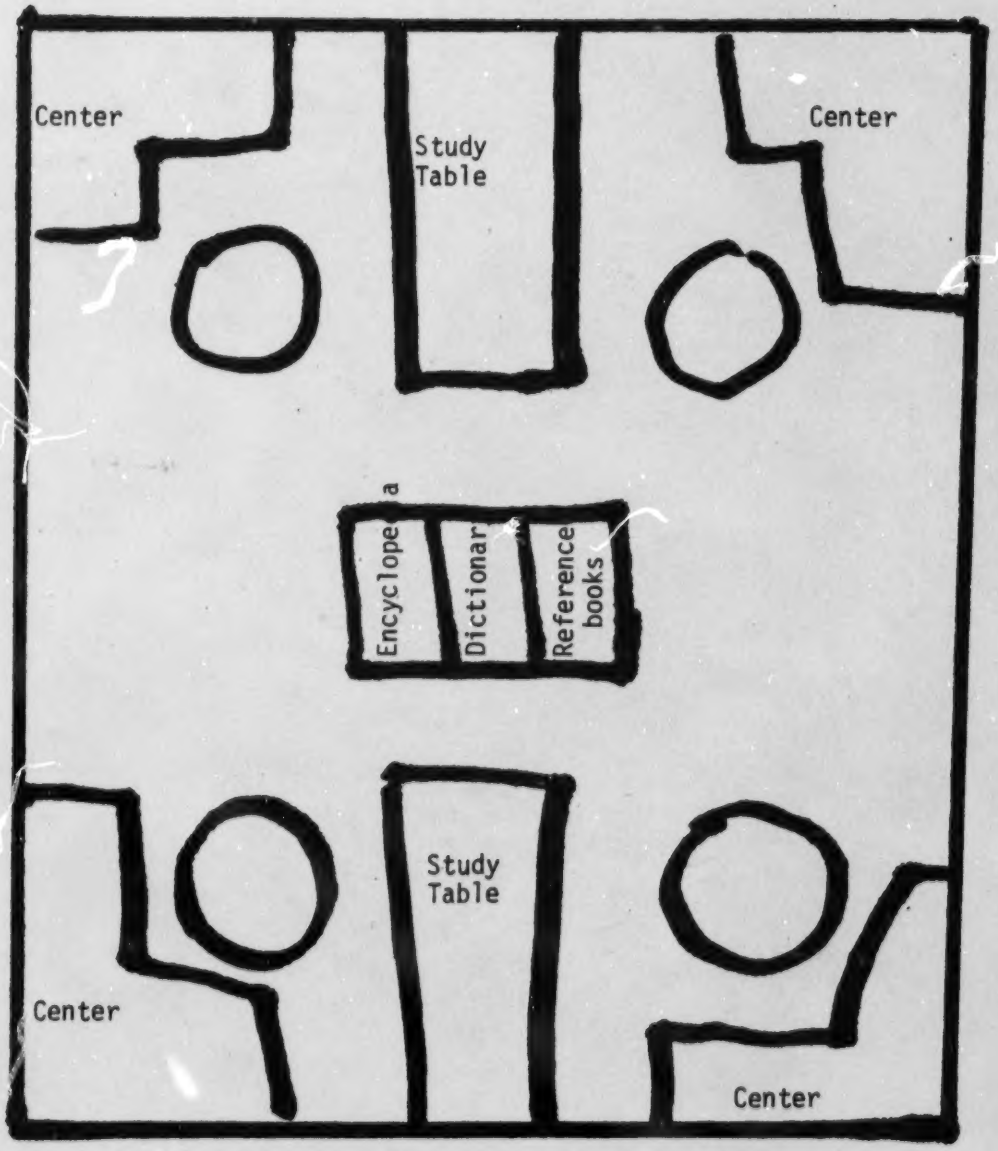
APPENDIX

REFERENCE NOTE

Dr. Malven Moore, Jr., professor of education at the Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, discussed The Thinking Skills at the July 13, 1983 Doctoral Seminar.

FIGURE I

A Classroom Setting suitable for Black Gifted Students



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